



DEVELOPING STUDENTS' POTENTIAL THROUGH THE ESPS (EMPOWERMENT AND PUBLIC SPEAKING SKILLS) PROGRAM AT THE ZAINUL HASAN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL

Aminullah Hasan Kustiana Arisanti

Universitas Zainul Hasan Genggong, Probolinggo, Indonesia
aminullahhasan20@gmail.com

Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the ESPS (Empowerment Skill Public Speaking) Program in improving communication skills among junior high school students at Zainul Hasan Islamic Boarding School. The study was motivated by the low level of self-confidence and public speaking competence among students, characterized by communication anxiety, unclear articulation, and unsystematic speech delivery. This research employed a approach using the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) empowerment model. The participants consisted of 30 first-grade junior high school students selected purposively. Data were collected through participatory observation, documentation, and performance evaluation before and after the training program. The findings indicate significant improvement in students' confidence, vocal techniques, speech organization, and audience engagement. The average performance score increased from 60 to 78. The ESPS program proved effective as an asset-based soft skill development model within the pesantren context. The study concludes that asset-oriented approaches integrated with contextual and continuous practice can gradually enhance students' public speaking competence in alignment with the cultural environment of Islamic boarding schools.

Keywords: Public Speaking, Student Empowerment, ESPS, ABCD, Islamic Boarding School Education

INTRODUCTION

As institutions of Islamic education, pesantren play a strategic role in shaping the character, spirituality, and intellectual capacity of their students. Historically, Islamic boarding schools have contributed to building the scholarly traditions and moral values of the Muslim community in Indonesia. However, in the context of modern social development, Islamic boarding schools face new challenges that require strengthening students' communication and social leadership competencies. Public speaking has become one of the essential skills that students must possess as future preachers, community leaders, and agents of social change.

Public speaking is not only about verbal skills but also encompasses psychological aspects such as self-confidence, emotional control, and the ability to engage with the audience (Rahmawati 2007) states that success in public speaking is influenced by mastery of the subject matter, vocal techniques, and the ability to structure a message systematically. In the context of da'wah, effective communication serves as the primary means of conveying Islamic values (Hidayat, 2015).

Preliminary observations at the Zainul Hasan Islamic Boarding School indicate that some first-year junior high school students face challenges in public speaking. Symptoms include unstable voice, unclear articulation, limited eye contact, and a disjointed delivery structure. This phenomenon indicates the presence of communication anxiety, which, if left unaddressed, can hinder the development of the students' potential. Ardianto (2012)

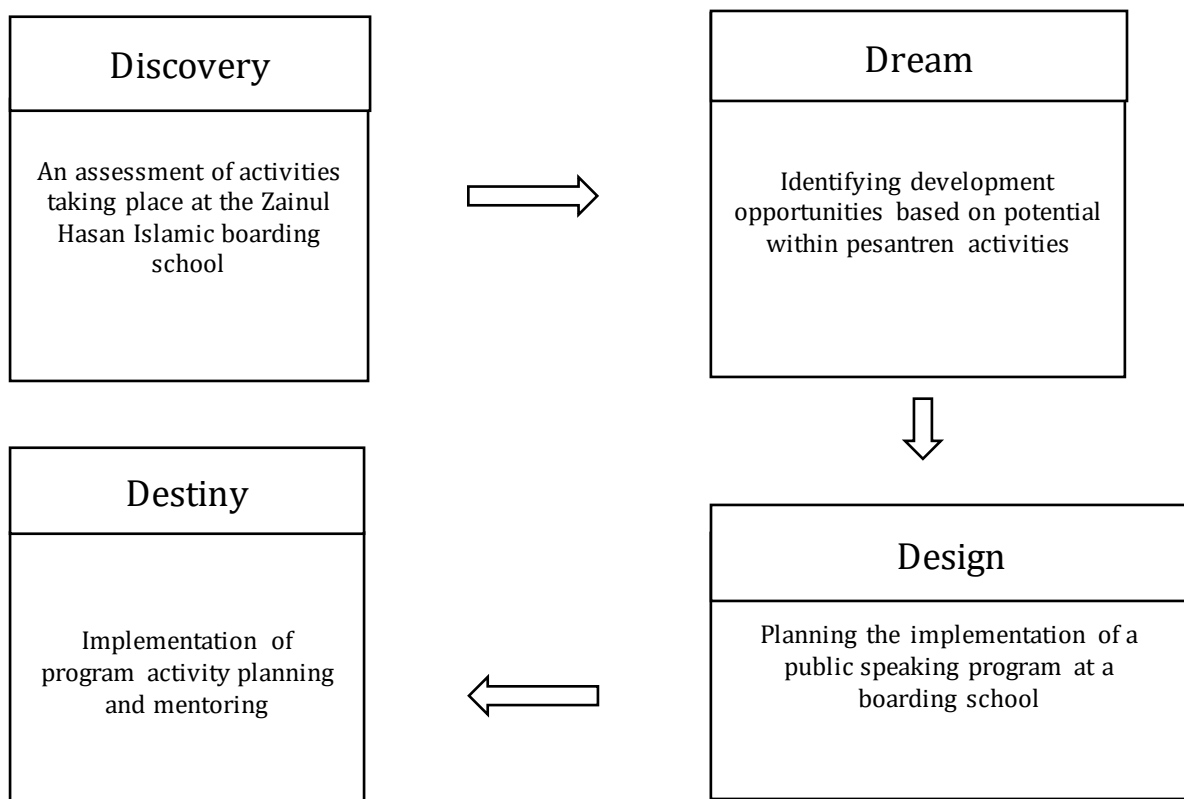
emphasizes that speaking anxiety can be overcome through repeated practice and structured habituation.

Within the framework of empowerment, the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach offers a relevant solution. This approach emphasizes the strengthening of a community's internal assets and potential as the foundation for social change (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Islamic boarding schools possess assets such as the traditions of khithobah, musyawarah, and discussion forums that can be optimized as spaces for communication practice. Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the ESPS Program as a model for public speaking development based on pesantren assets.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This community service project employs the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach, an empowerment approach that focuses on utilizing and strengthening the assets already possessed by the community. (CHRISTANTI et al., 2025) This approach was chosen because Islamic boarding schools possess various potentials—including the individual assets of the students, the culture of religious activities, and institutional support—that can be optimized to improve public speaking skills. The focus of the activities is not only on the issue of the students' lack of self-confidence but also on developing existing potential in a more targeted and systematic manner. (Potensi et al., 2025)

The subjects of this service-learning project were 30 first-year junior high school students selected through purposive sampling based on their need for communication development. The selection of first-year students was based on the consideration that they are in the early stages of character development and are just beginning to build the confidence to speak in public; therefore, training is more effective when provided at an early stage.

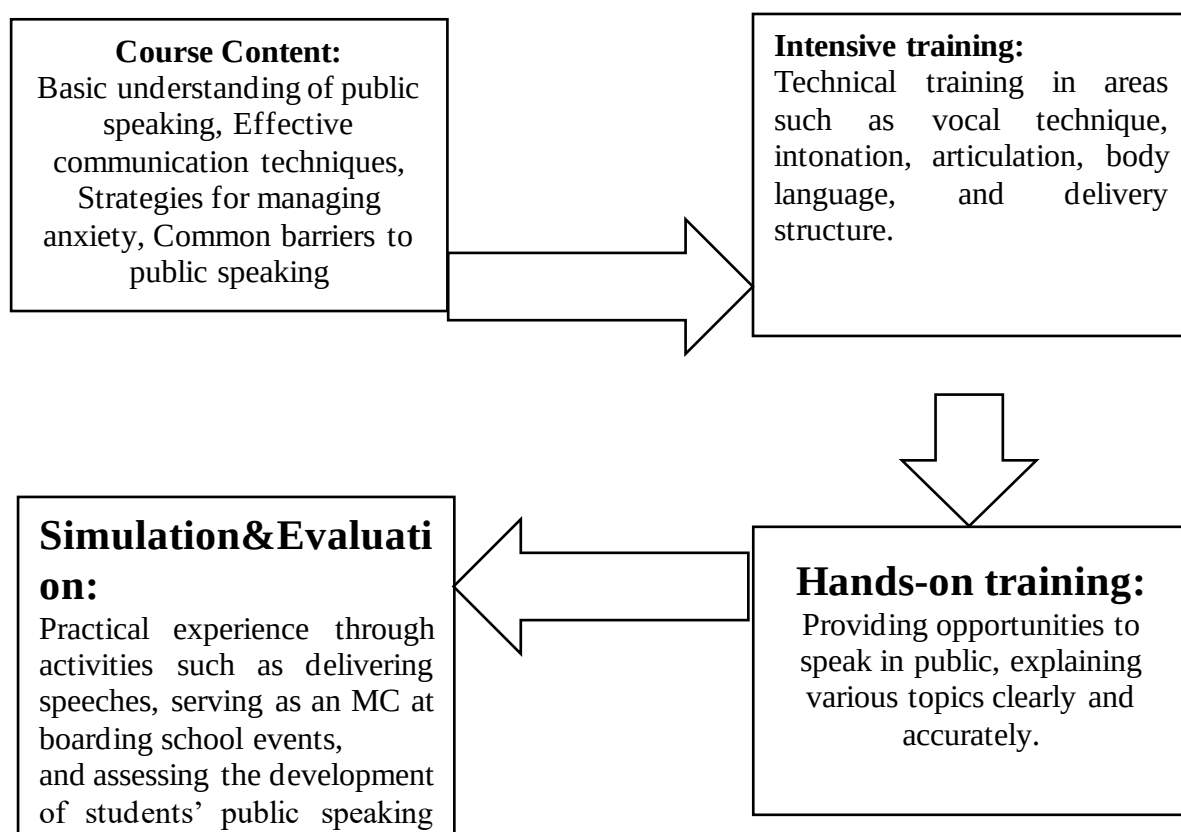


The implementation of the ESPS program began with an assessment of the pesantren's resources, such as public speaking events, short religious talks, and discussion forums, which could serve as platforms for practical training. Next, participants received training on the concepts of effective communication, voice management techniques, delivery structure, and strategies for overcoming nervousness. Following this, the students participated in an intensive training program that emphasized exercises in articulation, intonation, volume, body language, and self-confidence. The activities continued with hands-on practice within the pesantren setting, accompanied by guidance and evaluative feedback.

Data was collected through participatory observation, activity documentation, and pre- and post-program performance evaluations. Assessment indicators included articulation, intonation, volume, delivery structure, body language, and confidence level. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman model through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The ABCD approach in this ESPS program demonstrates that optimizing pesantren assets can effectively improve students' public speaking skills in a gradual and sustainable manner.

RESULTS OF THE DISCUSSION

The ESPS (Empowerment Skill Public Speaking) program is designed as a systematic, step-by-step training model to develop students' communication skills across mental, technical, and performance-based aspects. The program is not implemented all at once but rather through several sequential, interconnected phases. Each phase has distinct yet integrated objectives, methods, and competency outcomes. (Sigiro et al., 2024)



The first stage of the ESPS Program involves providing foundational material on public speaking. This stage serves as both a conceptual and mental foundation for the students before they begin intensive practice. During this phase, students are taught the nature of public speaking, its importance in their lives, and its role in da'wah and social leadership. (Sigirot et al., 2024) The material is not merely theoretical but also addresses psychological aspects, particularly how to manage nervousness and build self-confidence. Students are introduced to the basic concepts of effective communication, the structure



of a presentation (introduction-body-conclusion), vocal techniques such as articulation and intonation, and the importance of body language. (Asriadi et al., 2024)

In this stage, basic exercises are conducted, such as breathing exercises for vocal stability, clear pronunciation of vowels and consonants, and reading short texts with proper intonation. (Siti Alaina & Anshori, 2021) This preparatory phase aims to build awareness that speaking ability is not merely a natural talent but a skill that can be learned and practiced. Psychologically, this preparatory phase serves to reduce the initial anxiety levels that were previously quite prevalent among some students. Observation results indicate

that after this phase, students begin to dare to speak, albeit within a limited scope.

The second stage is intensive practice. In this phase, students no longer merely understand the concepts but begin to internalize the techniques through repeated practice. Practice is conducted in a structured manner with a specific duration set for each session. Students are asked to practice delivering short presentations, such as self-introductions, personal experiences, or simple moral messages. Each presentation is evaluated directly by the facilitator and peers. (Arifandi et al., 2025)

Figure 1. Public speaking training session

In this intensive training, the primary focus is directed toward three key aspects: vocal techniques, mastery of material structure, and nonverbal expression. Vocal techniques include volume control, clarity of articulation, and variation in intonation to avoid monotony. Mastery of material structure is practiced through the creation of a simple outline before speaking, so that the delivery becomes more systematic and does not jump around. Meanwhile, nonverbal aspects include eye contact, hand gestures, and body posture that reflect self-confidence.

The dynamics that emerged during this phase were quite significant. At the start of the training, some students still appeared stiff and hesitant. However, through

repetition and practice, their comfort level increased. This intensive training process demonstrated that developing public speaking skills requires consistency and the courage to try repeatedly. Gradually, the students began to show improvement in their fluency and ability to engage the audience, albeit on a small scale.

The third stage is hands-on training. This stage is the most critical phase of the ESPS Program because the students no longer practice in a simulated setting but instead participate in actual boarding school activities. They are given the opportunity to serve as emcees for internal events, deliver short religious talks, or speak at weekly khithobah sessions. This hands-on practice has a strong psychological impact because the students speak in front of a real audience, not just practice partners. At this stage, a more tangible transformation is evident in terms of courage and self-confidence. Some students who previously tended to be passive begin to show the courage to volunteer to perform. Although technical shortcomings remain, their self-confidence has increased significantly..

In addition, contextual practice helps students understand that public speaking is not merely a rhetorical exercise, but a means of conveying meaningful values and messages. This strengthens their intrinsic motivation. In the final evaluation, improvements were observed in the clarity of delivery, vocal stability, and more natural use of body language compared to the initial stage.

The students demonstrated better clarity of delivery, with more structured and easily understandable pronunciation. Voice stability also improved, as the students were able to speak at a more consistent volume and not as softly as in the initial stage. Furthermore, their use of body language became more natural and less stiff than before, thereby supporting the effectiveness of their communication. Overall, this in-person training phase serves as evidence that real-world practice plays a crucial role in strengthening the students' abilities, self-confidence, and readiness to speak in public. This phase also marks the culmination of the mentoring process within the ESPS Program, demonstrating that a practice-based approach is effective in developing students' communication potential in a gradual and sustainable manner.

The fourth stage is the evaluation and reinforcement stage. Evaluation is conducted by comparing initial and final performance based on predetermined indicators. The results show that the students' average abilities improved significantly. In addition to technical improvements, the most notable changes were observed in their mental resilience and confidence in performing. Students who were previously reluctant to speak are now beginning to take the initiative.

This evaluation also serves as a space for reflection for the students to understand their individual strengths and weaknesses. Reinforcement is provided in the form of motivation and further guidance so that the skills acquired do not end with the program alone, but become a sustainable habit in pesantren life. Overall, the details of the ESPS stages demonstrate a gradual and progressive development pattern: beginning with the establishment of mental foundations and concepts, followed by structured intensive practice, then direct application in real-world contexts, and concluding with reflective evaluation. This pattern demonstrates that the development of public speaking requires a combination of theoretical understanding, repeated practice, and direct experience. The

ESPS program not only enhances technical speaking skills but also builds the students' self-confidence and social readiness as future leaders and da'wah communicators.

CONCLUSION

The Public Speaking Skills Empowerment Program (ESPS) at the Zainul Hasan Islamic Boarding School successfully boosted the students' self-confidence, reduced their nervousness, and improved their public speaking skills through the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach. Of the 30 participating students, 7 demonstrated excellent skills with fluent, structured, and confident delivery, while the others showed improvement in terms of courage, basic understanding of public speaking, and readiness to perform, although there were still some technical challenges such as suboptimal intonation and gestures.

The phased approach—which included material preparation, intensive training, hands-on practice, and evaluation—proved effective because it utilized the boarding school's activities as a practical training medium. Overall, the ESPS program had a positive impact on developing the students' communication skills and strengthening their readiness to preach, lead activities, and interact confidently within the boarding school and the wider community.

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